

TOGETHER LET OUR HEARTS AGREE

By
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fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master's of Fine
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Version of the following thesis:

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From my earliest memories I have used drawing as a way to deepen my experiences of the things I encountered: movie monsters, comic book heroes, baseball and church. In time this practice became a ritual, and the resulting objects, artifacts of my own comprehension. It became a habit to re-imagine that which I was fascinated by. By drawing and redrawing the characters I was seeing I made them my own. This approach is an important part of my current work and is the impetus for this series. Some of my most meaningful personal experiences have come from involvement on a team or with a group as we endeavored toward a common goal. The communities I have been a part of offer a transient history described by communal hopes and important personal relationships. In retrospect these relationships and shared desires define my sense of self. In the thesis exhibition titled *"Together Let Our Hearts Agree"* I reinvent the world to reflect my current understanding and desires, searching for spirituality in relationships and personal connections.

I felt compelled in *"Together Let Our Hearts Agree"* to incorporate collaboration in to the solitary task of private creation. The challenge and excitement of collaboration found in making a film, music, or printing enlivens my own personal creative pursuits. To achieve this I recruited a group of roughly twenty close friends and family members for one autumn



Clinton Ricketts, *Early the First Day*, 2010, colored pencil

day to create and stage an event. This event was photographically documented, and

used as resource material in my later prints and drawings. Each participant's emersion in the moment and improvisational reaction to staged tasks of group thinking and team building formed a narrative. In this narrative we as a group explored the importance of ritual, not as a connection to the supernatural, but as an activity that provides comfort through human contact and shared history. The rituals staged that day were framed within and influenced by the religious practices and beliefs crucial in the creation of our civilization. With artistic idealism we reconsidered the hierarchies reflected in these beliefs. In the drawing "*Early the First Day*" a team of men, bound visually in costume and in challenge, struggle against gravity and the unknown. The team stands unanchored in a forced, deceptive space pulling a rope from the unseen. With each heave they pull nearer their collective fortune or fate. This and other drawings from the series depict anonymous individuals defined by their relationships to each other, their environment, and the roles they play. The characters in these drawings perform as actors on a stage. The surface of the paper, like the stage, becomes a physical space for metaphysical thinking.

I feel personally bereft of meaningful spirituality or ritual. This feeling was first articulated during my attendance at a Native American Pow-wow in Chicago five years ago. I was at once moved and made envious by the rich cultural history and tradition of Native American spirituality. Through costume,



Clinton Ricketts, *Cradle*, 2010, colored pencil

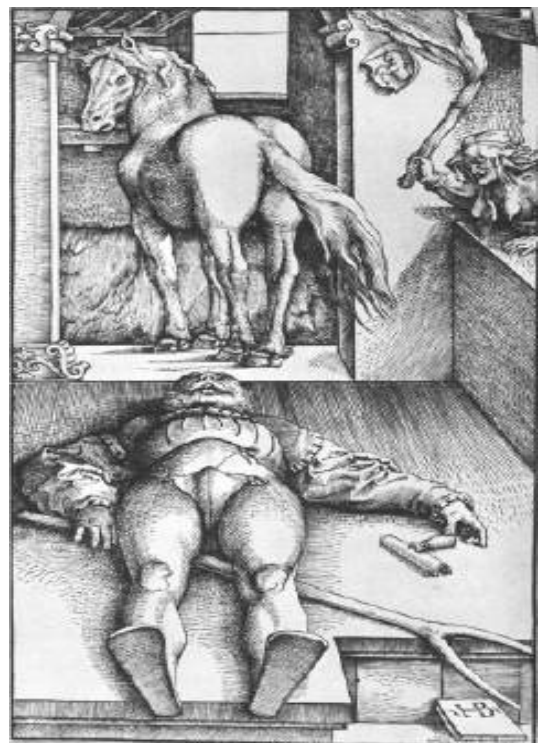


Clinton Ricketts, *Corner Two*, 2010, etching

song and ceremonial dance they had imparted from generation to generation a direct link to a unique and fascinating shared history. In the collective works of *“Together Let Our Hearts agree”* a narrative unfolds reflecting my personal desire to be a part of such a culture. We created ritual in the moment, inevitably shaped but not tied down by history. In the drawing *“Cradle”* a group of people slumber in a pile cuddled together for warmth and comfort. The group rests easy in spite a lack of shelter, cradled in the

inherent and mundane ritual of sleep. Above the sleepers floats a set of praying hands formed by the collective hopes of a transient community.

My work finds influence in both the distant past and the present. For example, from the strange and dark paintings and prints of the Northern Renaissance period, I find inspiration in both the depictions of the non-secular, and mundane works of that time as well as the imaginative way they made sense of the supernatural. In Hans Baldung Grien’s woodcut *“The Groom Bewitched”* from 1544, one can sense the artist’s dual struggle to relate to both the physical world of space and perspective, and the darker unknown of the unexplained. In the print *“Corner Two”* a hooded character simultaneously occupies two spaces.



Hans Baldung Grien, *The Groom Bewitched*, 1544, woodcut

Representing the unseen and the unknown he presides over a stage not yet built. This print, and others images in the series, are a sentimental reflection on a time when scientific naivety engendered a deeper relationship with the supernatural. In the works of this series characters earnestly inhabit the real and the imagined, unaware of any such confinements. Contemporary artist Neo Rauch explores a similar purposefully naïve take on physical confinements. Rauch explores personal and collective precepts through a mismatch of time, and a reimagining of history and cultures. Characters within his painting jump between



Clinton Ricketts, *Late, the LastDay*, 2010, colored pencil



Neo Rauch, *The Next Move*, 2007, oil on canvas

realities, defying definition. In the drawing “*Late, the Last Day*”, a self- portrait, we see the artist in an act of sacrifice. The removal of his hand is a symbol of dedication and sacrifice to the communal goals. The missing hand reveals a cartoonish inner working, producing a squirt of strawberry colored blood. The figure operates in an undefined space, and a time out of time. The absense of recognizable physical markers leaves this image ambiguos, but clear to leave a visceral response.

The choice of color palette in this series is also aimed at illiciting a visceral response. The use of color pencil echos the practice began as a child, inventing realities with crayon. People rendered in greens and blues reflects a morbid fascination with how death is depicted in popular culture, such as the

television show *'the Munsters.'*" The color green represents for me both decay and new life. It also represents a sterilization, commercialization, and detachment from the realities of our own mortality. Furthermore, etching speaks to my intentions of creating images displaced in time. My etchings reflect a desire to mimic the artists of the past, and their filtered view of their mysterious world.



The Munsters

The works of this series represent my current understanding of the world. Through the ritualistic practice of drawing I have reimagined the current chapter of my history. *"Together Let Our Hearts Agree"* is a sentimental reflection on the passing of an uniquely inspiring time in my life. These drawings and prints are a personal homage to the artists, friends, and family who have been a part of this chapter. In their love and creativity I have found a divinity supplanting traditional spirituality, and a shared history that will strengthen my personal future.

